Department of Community Affairs
State of Georgia

NEWS

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States Hold First Ever Geographic Information Meeting

ATLANTA — Representatives of 39 states recently met in Atlanta to discuss states' approaches to geographic information. The meeting was the first of its kind specifically dedicated to states' use of geographic information and systems. Georgia Governor Zell Miller invited one or two key representatives from each state to the meeting, held on October 27 to 29. Attendees discussed state geographic information activities, created a new "National States Geographic Information Council," and decided to meet again in September, 1992, in New Mexico.

While in the past, state geographic information system (GIS) staff have convened at various professional association meetings, a meeting dedicated to states' issues and concerns had been needed. All 50 states use geographic information systems in one way or another, with some larger states using GIS in at least 10 different functions or agencies. Many states have instituted official coordinating bodies, some with statutory directives. More and more, state geographic information efforts also include local governments, federal agencies, academia, and the private sector.

Representatives of many types of agencies, conducting a variety of GIS functions, were invited. Attendees represented policy and planning offices, computing and/or GIS service centers, natural resource and environmental protection agencies, transportation, community and local affairs, and economic development agencies, and others. Some attendees were managers; others were appointed or elected chairs or staffs of coordinating groups.

Specific topics addressed included: internal management and coordination; multi-state cooperation; legislation; data development, administration, access and dissemination; and coordination groups and approaches. Sessions were also devoted to discussing relations with

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external entities, including local governments, regional associations, federal agencies, the private and non-profit sectors, and academia.

The need for more and improved coordination with the federal government was listed as the group's top priority. Representatives of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC), a 14 member federal interagency group, spoke about coordination of federal interagency and non-federal GIS efforts. State representatives will work with them to address common issues in the coming months.

Coordination with local governments and regional associations was also listed as a top priority. Other major issues noted were financing and legal concerns. The need for "metadata" (data about data) and for common standards and approaches to data definition and documentation were repeatedly stated.

Participants were enthusiastic about the meeting's benefits and importance. Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, in a letter to the convened group, called for states to "take the lead role in the adoption of GIS technology so that the full benefit of integration can be realized." Following this lead, attendees decided to establish a new National States Geographic Information Council, with a steering committee, and to meet again in September, 1992. Phil Thiel, Chief of Information Services in the Office of Government Information, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and Richard Taupier, Assistant Director of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, were selected as co-chairs of the new council.

Attendees and presenters were selected based primarily on information gathered in preparing the State Geographic Information Activities Compendium, published by the Council of State Governments. Its Principal Investigator, Lisa Warnecke, provided a summary of the findings and comparisons of state approaches to geographic information. Warnecke and Phil Thiel, representing Georgia and its Department of Community Affairs, were the primary organizers of the meeting. It was sponsored by Erdas, TASC, Hughes Spatial Data Systems, and Trimble Navigation. Each corporate sponsor contributed funds to hold the meeting and subsidize the travel costs of some state representatives with limited travel funds. Educational sessions were also presented by the sponsoring firms. A synopsis of the meeting is being prepared and will be available early in 1992.

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